

## BC SERVICE EFFORT IN GHANA GOES SOLAR

--BY MELISSA BEECHER, STAFF WRITER

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (June 2008) -- Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah and his group of volunteers are looking to change lives - and to do so in an environmentally friendly way.

For the last six years, the O'Neill Library Instructional Services manager has led service trips to his hometown of Ejisu, Ghana. There, the volunteers have partnered with World Computer Exchange, a nonprofit computer supplier run by BC alumnus Tim Anderson '73, to bring more than 100 computers to St. Anthony's Catholic School of Ejisu. In addition, BC students and faculty regularly travel to Ghana to teach the young students how to use the technology.

But the hardware is only half the battle, Sarkodie-Mensah said. In most of Western Africa, including Ghana, electricity is available only about 20 percent of the time, so computer lessons are usually delayed.



**Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah**

"There is a frustration because we have needy children who have workstations, but no way to use them," Sarkodie-Mensah said.

Enter Marla DeRosa, an adjunct faculty member in the English Department, who has traveled to Ghana on several occasions. After seeing the problem firsthand, she realized the solution was in front of them – solar power.



"It's so sunny there that it seemed like a pretty obvious solution," DeRosa said. "Most businesses in the area that require reliable electricity use diesel-powered generators, but those are noisy and polluting. We felt that by putting a green energy source in a public place, like the school, it would show others in the community that solar power is an option."

**LEFT: Marla DeRosa with students -- sporting BC shirts --from St. Anthony's Catholic School in Ejisu, Ghana**

"We're all concerned about global warming and by utilizing renewable energy sources, especially in developing countries, it just seems like the best way to go," said DeRosa.

The solar panels come at a cost, however - about \$50,000. DeRosa is hoping to raise that money by the end of the month, before Sarkodie-Mensah takes another group of BC student volunteers to Ghana on July 23.

DeRosa has found a great deal of support within her own family. Her husband and son have already raised money and collected books for St. Anthony's library and her niece, Siena Faughnan, 14, from Colorado will join DeRosa for the second time when she travels back to Ghana later this month.

"I am the one that feels lucky to participate in something like this," said DeRosa. "Kwasi is such an inspiration and this is a way we can all give back to those who really need our help."

Sarkodie-Mensah said when he first went to Ghana in 2002, he made the journey alone and with a single laptop. Watching the trip grow to regularly include 14 to 16 people, hundreds of computers and now solar power has been "a dream come true."

"I know that the people of Ghana are surprised and in awe that people in Boston would make an effort to help their children," said Sarkodie-Mensah. "The mayor, the teachers, every single person says how thankful they are.

"But, me, I am not surprised. So many people at Boston College understand how important it is to help the children," Sarkodie-Mensah said. "I am just so happy so many people have supported the work."

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